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by Richard Crowder

# JOHN POMPI

## IMPACT WRENCH

In Tortola in the British Virgin Islands, John Pompei was working on a customer's boat. He didn't have the specific tools he needed, so he learned to improvise, even working on a park bench.

"I had to solve a lot of problems that you wouldn't see here," said Pompei. "I had to be adaptable and work with only the tools I brought and improvise all the time to solve the problems at hand." It wouldn't be a stretch to call Pompei the MacGyver of boat rigging, the title his wife Elizabeth bestowed on him. "I can work anywhere, like the park bench I used as a workshop in Tortola," he laughed.

The name John Pompei probably doesn't jump off the end of your tongue when you think of famous riggers from the early days of offshore or performance boating and that's the way he seems to prefer it. Truth be told, I had never heard of John Pompei when I was assigned this article.

"I enjoy working out of the lime-light," he said. "I don't advertise; I don't display at shows; I have a close network of engine builders and riggers that I share information and projects with. I will never slam anyone in this business in order to get another job. People and friendships are just too important to me and this business is very small. I take great pride in maintaining the confidentiality of my customers."

To say that Pompei is a tough interview is akin to calling Reggie Fountain a pretty good promoter. Pompei is extremely tight-lipped when recalling anything that might be regarded as confidential. He's the kind of friend and colleague everyone wants but the type of interview journalists don't look forward to.

I arrived at John's shop, which is in a quiet rural setting just south of Daytona

Beach, on a late fall day to find him waiting for me sitting in a lawn chair behind his late-sixties classic Camaro. Inside the open doors of his shop were his two current rigging projects, a huge newish cat and an older V-bottom. His wife, Elizabeth, two sons, Julian and James, daughter Shelby, two dogs, and two horses were also there that day enjoying the peace, solitude, and tranquillity of the setting. The setting matches his lifestyle.

"I went to vocational school learning to be a mechanic in the early seventies but I didn't want to be in the automotive end of it," he says. He was in Miami near NE 188th Street and worked at Cigarette at nights after school. "Don Aronow put me to work doing a little prep work on engines and readying them for installation." He stayed at Cigarette full-time for a couple of years after he graduated and found he most enjoyed rigging boats.

He then met Mark McManus of Cigarette and Apache fame whom John credits with helping him along enormously. In 1979, John and a partner opened Total Performance in North Miami specializing in rigging and repair. McManus Powerboats became one of his sole outside contractors and sent Pompei all over the world to sort out any problems that McManus customers may have had.

In 1986 he set off on his own opening Marine Performance in the Hollywood/Ft. Lauderdale area. "Being in South Florida in the sixties, seventies, and eighties was fabulous," he says. "There was awesome action on the water and off." All of his work involved mainly contract work with manufacturers—a mixture of race and pleasure boats. Custom rigging was his main forte be it single, twin, triple, or quads, gas, diesel, or turbines— every kind of installation with whatever combination





Offshore performance veteran mechanic John Pompi prefers to let his rigging do the talking.

# ***MARINE PERFORMANCE***





## JOHN POMPI

*John (right) with his father in 1995, at the stern of the 46' Cougar endurance race boat with triple Cat diesels and Arneson ASD-10 surface drives.*



*47' Apache "Running Brave" showing dash and John at the helm.*

of drives. "I love to do unusual projects like prototyping. I love to think out a project and then make it work. It gives me something different to work on every day." After it caught fire in

France in the early '90's, he rigged "Running Brave," a 47 Apache. He rigged the famous 38 Cigarette, "Hot Shot" among others.

His reputation earned him many jobs

with the US military on marine contracts and he spent "a bunch" of time travelling all over the world working on sometimes top-secret work. Pompei simply wouldn't offer a sniff of what some of that work entailed.

In 1996 he moved to his present digs near Daytona in order to "get out of Miami and get a better quality of family life." This move introduced Pompei to one of his most challenging projects—one that would consume the next five years of his life. He had re-powered and re-rigged a 40 Magnum for a client who introduced Pompei to his friend David Callan, a businessman who wanted to build a boat that no one else had ever built. "David wanted to build some extreme machines," recalled Pompei.

David Callan assembled a three-man team of a designer, an engineer, and John Pompei as rigger to create the Callan 55, a closed cockpit, 55' V-bottom pleasure boat constructed of exotic lay-ups and powered by twin T-55 Lycoming turbines with Arneson surface drives. As part of this project, Pompei spent considerable time with Howard Arneson studying his set-ups with turbines and Arneson drives. The objective was to create the fastest boat of its size. They achieved that when it ran over 120 mph. "Not bad for a 55 footer," beamed Pompei.

Next came a 48' cat with twin T-55 turbines and BPM surface drives built to break the 200-mph barrier. At the 2002



*John Pompei's pet project Callan 55 with twin Lycoming T-55 turbines.*







Don Aronow (center) between Ralph Johnson (right) and John Pompei (left) in 1980, doing a sea trial on a triple engine 36' Cigarette. Below: John sitting proud in the engine bay of a quad-Cobra power installation that he rigged.



46' Cougar endurance race boat with triple Cat diesels, Arneson ASD 10 surface drives.

Bud Shootout in The Lake of the Ozarks, it did just that and more. One of Pompei's greatest thrills is to test the boats once he has rigged them.

But Pompei prefers to work with manufacturers where he can be given a project and immerse himself in rigging and problem solving and not have to worry about the other aspects of the business.

"When I was a kid, I went to school with Tim "Bones" Moran, the present head of rigging at Nor-Tech. "Tim worked for me for several years and is an awesome rigger. He's like a blood brother to me. I love working with him. We started together and we learned rigging together."

Today Pompei is involved in some special projects with Trond Schou and Nils at Nor-Tech, and of course his old friend "Bones", sorting out the rigging of Nor-Tech's new 80' monohull superyacht. His involvement is in the engine room rigging of C-32 Caterpillars with Arneson ASD14 surface drives. Check out his work when you next see this incredible yacht.

"I just love what I do—I love rigging, and I just want to continue doing it," said Pompei. "If I can combine that with travel, then I'm happy." And if you ever have a chance to meet Pompei, choose your words carefully, gain his confidence, listen attentively and you will learn an awful lot, because he holds a wealth of knowledge close to the vest. 🦋



1976 Bertram 38' race boat, restored by John Pompei in 2002.



John aboard the first-ever triple-engine Cigarette, in 1978.



Lots of air under the 37' Cigarette "Hot Shot" that John rigged.